

COLUMBIA SPECTATOR

ARCHIVE

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Got problems? Nightline can help

By Elisabeth Oldmixon and the
Nightline staff

Today, hundreds of balloons adorn the campus. Many people may wonder what Nightline is and what it is all about. In conjunction with their annual ballooning of the campus, the staff of Nightline has decided that it is time to let the campus know who they are and how they serve the Columbia and Barnard communities.

Currently, Nightline is made up of 45 student peer counselors and four advisors. The staff comes from Columbia College, Barnard College, the School of Engineering and Applied Science, General Studies and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences. Although there is no quota on the number of counselors they may have, they generally take 15 new counselors a year.

Every fall, training begins for potential counselors. Each counselor must go through an entire

semester of training led by both Nightline staff members and professionals from the campus and the city. The training is rigorous and covers many topics such as relationships, AIDS, pregnancy and abortion, issues of sexuality, suicide, drug and alcohol issues, academic pressure, eating disorders, family problems, depression, sexual and physical assault and abuse, anxiety, referrals or even insomnia. The counselors' training is certainly not limited to those topics.

At the end of each training semester, each student must go through a selective certification process. This includes having the potential counselor take a mock Nightline call. The counselor's call is evaluated by both current Nightline staff members and professionals. If those people evaluating the call feel the counselor is "not ready" to counsel on the staff, the student may choose to go through a

shorter re-training the spring semester.

The current Nightline staff, as well as past staffs, is made up of caring, devoted and highly committed volunteer counselors. The counselors choose the nights they wish to be "on the phones" and switch off with the other counselors.

Nightline's most important rule is a strict code of confidentiality. Calls are never, ever discussed with anyone outside of the Nightline staff. This includes not discussing calls with the administration, mental health services, or security.

Counseling is done on a strictly anonymous basis. Nightline counselors neither ask for a caller's identity nor do they have a way of tracing their callers. Likewise, their counselors' identities are kept confidential. None of the staff is publicly known except for the director, Elisabeth Oldmixon. She is the only contact with the outside campus and community. Because she is "public", she no longer counsels on the phones.

Nationwide, crisis calls at college campus hotlines have been on the rise. The staff recognizes that there is more of a need than ever before for peer counseling hotlines. The counselors are continually trained to help with any new concerns or problems, or any problem at all.

Elisabeth Oldmixon is a Barnard College junior.

Nightline is entirely student run. The staff is here for the students of Columbia. They want to talk to you

about any topic whether it takes five minutes or three hours. Nightline has already talked with over three thousand callers since its inception. Nightline is here for you from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. at x47777.